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For its role in Lebanon, US needs the right script

by Curtis Wilkie
Globe Staff

LARNACA, Cyprus - President Reagan, expressing the frustration of many Americans, has committed the United States to a policy of encouraging the world

NEWS ANALYSIS

shut down the Beirut airport, and there are hints from Washington about plans to abduct the jackers and bomb Shiite Moslem strongholds in the countryside.

As he weighed retaliation, Reagan let it be known that he had just seen the latest "Rambo" film, a bloody tale of violence, rescue and revenge featuring Sylvester Stallone.

What Reagan may not have known is that the "Rambo" movie have developed a cult following in Beirut. Moslem militiamen fill the theaters, cheer the blood-letting, and sometimes fire their guns into the ceilings of the cinemas in excitement.

From the inception of his administration, Reagan and his policymakers have shown little understanding of Lebanon, and have unwittingly helped make it unsafe for Americans to walk the streets of Beirut.

At this point, American retaliation might give the president some psychic satisfaction, but history shows that it would be counterproductive.

Emboldened perhaps, by the

ephemeral success of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who dispatched Marines to Beirut in 1958 to ensure that the government of Lebanese President Camille Chamoun would remain in power, the United States has tried in recent years to prop up the latest Christian government.

Siding with the Christians

Despite a radical change in demographics in Lebanon - with many Christians emigrating from the country while the Shiite numbers grew - America and its chief Middle East ally, Israel, kept their trust in the Maronite Christians.

Israel, of course, suffered deeply in blood and treasure for its invasion of Lebanon - a move tacitly approved at the highest State Department levels - in 1982.

Then the United States was drawn physically into the Lebanese snake pit. At first, the move was made for humanitarian reasons.

Reagan committed US troops to a multinational force that ensured a peaceful evacuation of Palestine Liberation Organization guerrillas, ending a summerlong siege of Beirut. But shortly after the PLO fighters left, Christian Phalangist soldiers carried out massacres at Sabra and Shatila. The multinational force, which had also left Beirut on the heels of the PLO, had promised that the civilians would be protected.

Following the slaughter, the United States shipped hundreds of Marines to rejoin a new multinational peace-keeping force.

Despite the bombing of the American Embassy with considerable loss of life, the Marines lived for months beside the predominantly Shiite neighborhood of Bourj el-Barajneh in south Beirut with few problems. Marines patrolled the streets of the lower-class area, handed out sweets to children and were generally welcomed.

But in the fall of 1983, new fighting broke out in the Shouf Mountains involving the Chris-

tian Phalangists and regular Lebanese Army troops allied with Lebanese President Amin Gemayel - against Moslem forces. Resorting to the pro-Christian precedent, the United States threw its firepower behind Gemayel and set the stage for a sequence of terrorist strikes that most recently resulted in the TWA hijacking. The use of the battleship New Jersey to shell Moslem villages is still remembered with bitterness.

Shiite extremists influenced by Iran and convinced that America was indeed the "Great Satan" because it had sided with the Christians in Lebanon's unending holy

war, are believed to have been behind the suicide bombing of Marine barracks near the Beirut airport in which 241 American servicemen died.

Terror and tactics

Repeated terrorist attacks finally persuaded Reagan to pull the Marines out of Lebanon ignominiously in early 1984, but the anti-American pressures continued.

Syria forced the Gemayel government to abrogate its agreement with Israel, a pact for which Secretary of State George P. Shultz served as midwife.

For a period, the United States appeared to treat Lebanon with benign neglect. But there was another bombing attack on a new American Embassy building, and several Americans were murdered or kidnapped. Last fall, Shultz enunciated a controversial doctrine that called for preemptive strikes against terrorists.

One senior American intelligence official said privately at the time he was appalled by Shultz' statements, because there is little way to avoid inflicting harm on innocent people when such tactics are employed.

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